

PINEY FALLS
CLASS II NATURAL-SCIENTIFIC STATE NATURAL AREA

COUNTY: Rhea

7.5' QUADRANGLE: Spring City, Pennine

PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: Cumberland Plateau

OWNERSHIP: State of Tennessee

ACREAGE: 440

YEAR DESIGNATED: 1973

DESCRIPTION: Piney Falls is a 440-acre natural area located in Rhea County where Little Piney and Soak Creeks have carved deep gorges into the Cumberland Plateau. It is a pristine forestland featuring creeks, deep gorges, waterfalls and old growth forest. Piney Falls is also recognized by the United States Department of Interior as a National Natural Landmark. It is one of only fourteen National Natural Landmarks in Tennessee. These landmarks are recognized as the country's best remaining examples of major biotic communities and geologic features.

Piney Falls is especially significant because of its old growth forest. The tallest and most magnificent trees are the white pines that are found in the mixed mesophytic forest that occur on lower slopes in the gorge below Lower Piney Falls. These trees are nearly 40 inches in diameter and exceed 100 feet in height. The mixed mesophytic forest below the Upper Falls is not nearly as spectacular, as it lacks the giant white pines found in the gorge below Lower Piney Falls. However, large tulip popular, hemlock, buckeye, and basswood do grow below Upper Piney Falls. The upland rim above the falls is comprised of a typical plateau oak-pine forest.

Little Piney Creek drains the majority of the area plunging some 80 feet over the picturesque Upper Piney Falls into the pool below, and then eventually drops another 40 feet over Lower Piney Falls. At Upper Piney Falls, a concave ledge circles behind and around the falls where visitors can follow a trail for an awe-inspiring view of the gorge below. Lower Piney Falls, which is smaller in stature, and not accessible by trail, plunges into a much narrower gorge. From here, the Little Piney Creek continues, and joins with Soak Creek before emptying into the Piney River.

Spring visitors to the area will see an abundance of wildflowers that include the state listed dwarf milkwort, bloodroot, hepatica, crested iris, yellow wake robin, perfoliate bellwort, and spotted geranium. The old growth forest structure, diversity in species composition, and picturesque waterfalls provides both scenic value and ecological significance.

SITE MANAGEMENT: Cumberland Mountain State Park, 24 Office Drive, Crossville, Tennessee 38555, phone (931) 484-6138; Division of Natural Areas, 401 Church Street, 7th Floor L&C Annex, Nashville, Tennessee 37243, phone (615) 532-0431; Division of Natural Areas – East TN office, 3711 Middlebrook Pike, Knoxville, TN 37921, phone (865) 594-5601.

PUBLIC ACCESS: Public is access allowed; parking and hiking trails are provided. Access is for foot traffic only. Vehicles and camping are not allowed.

DIRECTIONS: From Spring City take State Route 68 north toward Crossville, or from Crossville travel south on S.R. 68. As you get to the crest of the Cumberland escarpment, you enter the unincorporated town of Grandview. Look for a sign for Piney Falls State Natural Area and turn onto the Fire Tower Road (a.k.a., Hillary Road). The trailhead is on the right approximately one mile from Highway 68 or one-fourth mile before you get to the fire tower, which is located at the end of the road.